

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE
THURSDAY, AUGUST 22, 2013 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Beaulieu, Bryer, Cabral, DeMatto, Denno, Greenleaf, Heller, Koehler, O'Donnell, Semancik, Trejo, Volkmann, Watson (6:46 p.m.), Zod (6:40 p.m.)
Staff: Oefinger (7:42 p.m.), Schneider, Murphy, Robarge, Bresnayan
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Kemp Morhardt

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – July 11, 2013* and July 25, 2013*

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Koehler, to approve the minutes of July 11, 2013 as written.

The motion carried unanimously.

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Beaulieu, to approve the minutes of July 25, 2013 as written.

The motion carried unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Chairman Heller received a note from Natalie Burfoot Billing asking when the Town decided on one middle school. He had a conversation with her and indicated that no decisions have been made at this point. Volkmann received an e-mail from Ms. Billing and stated she would forward it to staff to distribute to the Task Force.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. School Construction Scenarios – The SLAM Collaborative (architects)

Mr. Zuba presented a PowerPoint presentation on building construction scenarios and site selection update. He provided a recap of the preferred options previously identified by the Task Force. The architect, Kemp Morhardt of the SLAM Collaborative, provided an overview of his firm and his background.

Mr. Morhardt provided an overview of the state reimbursement rate for school construction/renovation, which is trending downward. For 2014, the rates will be 56.07% for renovate to new and 46.07% for new construction. Mr. Morhardt reviewed the cost modeling assumptions used in the building construction scenarios noting that they are based on educational specifications (which are not currently available from the Board of Education). Reimbursement rates are based

on the 2014 rates in anticipation of a spring referendum. Costs exclude hazardous materials abatement and site acquisition costs.

Mr. Morhardt provided a review of construction scenarios, allowances, timelines, and cost breakdowns as follows:

Scenario 1 - one new middle school of 1000 students, renovate to new West Side and Cutler for elementary schools, demolish S. B. Butler, Pleasant Valley, and Claude Chester: \$153,858,023 (total) with net cost to Groton \$84,577,436.

Mr. Zuba described the site selection process for a single middle school of 175,000 square feet with athletic fields. Ten potential sites have been identified and two are owned by the Town. Mr. Zuba provided a brief overview of the sites.

Scenario 1A - one new middle school of 1200 students, renovate to new West Side and Cutler for elementary schools, demolish S. B. Butler, Pleasant Valley, and Claude Chester: \$157,699,223 (total) with net cost to Groton \$87,706,348. It was noted that there was an inconsistency in the costs for scenarios 1 and 1A.

Discussion followed on the need for educational specifications to determine teacher-student ratio and team sizes, which will impact space requirements.

Scenario 2 - renovate to new/additions to West Side and Cutler, build two new elementary schools, and demolish S. B. Butler, Pleasant Valley, Claude Chester, and portables at Charles Barnum and Mary Morrisson: \$148,569,406 (total) with net cost to Groton \$79,844,381.

Scenario 3 - build two new middle schools, renovate to new West Side and Cutler for elementary schools, and demolish S. B. Butler, Pleasant Valley, Claude Chester, and portables at Charles Barnum and Mary Morrisson: \$183,675,354 (total) with net cost to Groton \$102,037,366.

There was additional discussion about the need for educational specifications to establish a space program. Mr. Zuba explained that the intent of this exercise is to look at relative costs, narrow options, and build consensus. The costs are not all inclusive. But they provide individual pieces that can be dissected to arrive at other scenarios. The increase in costs from the last Phase II proposal is associated with escalation and decreasing reimbursement rates. There has been no analysis done on operational costs.

Denno clarified the group's task as deciding on one middle school or two, of 1000 or 1200 students.

Mr. Zuba expressed confidence based on the last discussion with the Board of Education that these scenarios are in line with their desires, but the Task Force still needs to advise the Board of their preferences.

Zod noted that the Task Force has already reviewed the options and the only new information is the relative cost. Volkmann asked for a cost estimate for renovate to new of the two middle schools, without any changes to the elementary schools and Mr. Zuba provided the information.

It was noted that the survey which will include options will be statistically valid and hit every area of the community based on voting distribution.

Mr. Zuba noted that the consensus of the Task Force on July 25th was a one middle school scenario. Heller asked for a hand vote and the majority of Task Force members (11-3) supported a single middle school.

Discussion then turned to the impact of location on Task Force members' support for a single school. Mr. Zuba asked for a show of hands on the support for a single middle school on a great site, but not geographically centrally located and the count was 8 in favor, 6 opposed. He then asked about a centrally located middle school that takes prime real estate off the tax rolls, but no vote was taken. It was also noted that there is a difference between the geographic center of town and the demographic center, which is on the west side of town.

Mr. Zuba discussed the difficulties of developing the Merritt property next to the high school. He noted that the split between the east and west sides of town seems to be a big hurdle. Koehler reminded the Task Force that two middle schools will not adequately address racial imbalance. Mr. Zuba noted a proposed revision of the state's racial imbalance formula.

Volkmann suggested an option that would build a new middle school at the Kolnaski site, renovate to new at Cutler renovate West Side for an elementary school, and build a new elementary school.

The consultants noted that the Task Force must eliminate options before detailed site design can occur.

Discussion followed on the status of Grasso Tech and a pending meeting with the state.

Greenleaf thinks it is worthwhile for the Task Force to step back and look again at a 7-8 single middle school. Mr. Zuba stated that would require an additional elementary school, which prompted discussion on the elementary schools and other scenarios. Greenleaf suggested that the cost of the project must be under \$100,000,000 to be approvable.

Significant discussion occurred on the need to obtain more information from the Board of Education before creating more detailed information on multiple scenarios.

Mr. Morhardt provided corrected values for Scenario 1. It was noted that new construction is less expensive than renovate to new, not including site acquisition costs.

Mr. Zuba explained that the Task Force will face the same road blocks until the Board of Education provides direction. O'Donnell suggested constructing two new elementary schools and upgrading the two middle schools. Greenleaf noted that the deferred maintenance on the middle schools is significant.

Heller noted that cost wise, it makes sense to build one new middle school and two new elementary schools. Mr. Morhardt explained that the costs do not include site acquisition or demolition costs. Koehler suggested building a new middle school, and then demolishing Cutler and West Side and building two new elementary schools. Under this scenario students are not displaced and will be moving directly into new facilities. Cost information on this scenario was requested by the Task Force.

Volkman suggested renovating to new West Side and Cutler, building a new elementary school at Claude Chester, and enlarging Kolnaski.

Mr. Morhardt stated that he needs more information from the Board to provide more detailed cost information on renovating the middle schools to elementary schools or O'Donnell's suggestion of upgrading the middle schools rather than renovating to new.

Mr. Zuba expressed concern with the Task Force being able to meet its schedule without Board input and he asked for a reasonable time frame to receive information from the Board. Volkman noted the Board is very busy with other issues. Town Manager Oefinger asked Mr. Zuba to identify specific questions for the Board and schedule a meeting with them. He also suggested that the Task Force stay away from a site discussion at this point in time.

Mr. Morhardt stated he will attempt to put a space program together that can be validated by the Board by filling in the gaps between the construction scenarios and the existing educational specifications.

Town Manager Oefinger reminded the Task Force that a majority of the Board of Education has already indicated a preference for a single middle school.

Greenleaf reiterated that the right way to do this process is for the Board of Education to develop educational specifications and pass them on to the Task Force. Mr. Zuba noted that a plan cannot be brought to the state without educational specifications.

At the next meeting, the Task Force will discuss sites for a single middle school.

The regular meeting on September 12th was canceled to allow the consultant time to prepare follow up information and a special meeting was scheduled for September 26th at 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall Annex, CR1.

b. Update on Site Identification – Not discussed

c. Workgroup Discussion / Consensus Building – Discussed under IV. a)

d. Identification of Preferred Options – Discussed under IV. a)

V. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Trejo, seconded by Zod, to adjourn the meeting 9:35 at p.m.

The motion carried unanimously.